

Washington, DC — West Chester, PA – Today Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) visited the Dunwoody Retirement Center in West Chester where he spoke to constituents and discussed their concerns and his work on their behalf in the House of Representatives. He also talked about his work on behalf of seniors and veterans. He addressed a range of issues from the insightful questions of the seniors, from Iraq to immigration, education to the economy. — “It is important for me to get the chance to speak directly with our senior constituents. Our district and our nation need their wisdom and experience. As a wise saying goes, ‘the older I get, the smarter my father and mother get’. I get a sense of history and perspective from every senior’s event I attend,” said Congressman Sestak, “I believe accountability and accessibility to the families of our district are the keys to being an effective Representative. I try to spend as much time as I can coming to them to hear their concerns and get their feedback on what we are doing in Congress to help them.”

During his visit to the event the Congressman discussed his work benefiting seniors. Earlier this year he supported legislation that saves a vital housing program for seniors. The bill temporarily waives the cap on federally insured reverse mortgages, which enable homeowners to tap the equity in their house. A reverse mortgage is a unique loan that enables senior homeowners to stay in their homes and remain financially independent by converting part of the equity without having to sell the home, give up title or take on a new monthly mortgage payment. Additionally, the Congressman cosponsored and voted for legislation to require the government to negotiate for lower drug prices for American seniors and people with disabilities in the Medicare program. The Medicare Prescription Drug Negotiation Act of 2007 will help seniors get better prices on prescription medications under Medicare. The provision in the current Medicare Rx Drug law which explicitly forbids the Department of Health and Human Services from conducting such cost-reducing negotiations will be repealed. The Democratic bill will require—not just authorize—the Secretary for Health and Human Services to negotiate with pharmaceutical manufacturers. And he is also a cosponsor of the Elder Justice Act, a piece of legislation that would create the Elder Justice Coordinating Council to make recommendations on elder neglect, provide organizations and states with ombudsmen to address abuse and neglect in nursing homes, and provide older Americans with the same protections as victims of domestic abuse.

Moreover, Congressman Sestak supported the Congressional budget which included a reserve fund to reform and improve Medicare for beneficiaries and protect access to care. The proposed changes included improving the prescription drug benefits and creating a more sustainable system for paying physicians. Reserve funds provide a special mechanism to help high-priority policy initiatives clear budget process hurdles.

Congressman Sestak also spoke of his work for veterans. Since he has been in Congress, Congressman Sestak has fought for the men and women who have served and who are currently serving in our armed forces. He recently supported the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill which provided the largest single increase to the Veterans Administration budget in its 77 year history -- \$6.7 billion additional dollars for the Veterans Administration. With passage of this bill, the 110th Congress has voted for historic increases in veterans' health care and benefits programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion (including the joint resolution and the supplemental), to meet the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and make up for the Bush Administration's past shortcomings in its treatment of veterans. Specifically the bill provides the following: Historic funding for the Veterans' Administration, increasing its budget \$6.7 billion over last year's level; strengthened Veterans' Mental Health Services, an additional \$600 million has been added for mental health -- including post-traumatic stress disorder and brain injuries; strengthened our military by including an unprecedented \$21.4 billion for military construction; and enhanced accountability. This will help to ensure that the 1,145,918 veterans in Pennsylvania receive care worthy of their sacrifice.

Additionally, for the first time, the budget for VA medical care exceeds the budget of the veterans' service organizations by \$294 million. This will ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in FY 2008. It also significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors. And it provides much needed maintenance of VA health care facilities (funding is \$500 million above the President's request) to prevent a Walter Reed-type scandal from occurring -- a recent VA report outlined 1,000 specific problems at VA health facilities around the country, with a backlog of \$5 billion in maintenance.

The Congressman has also been fighting for the men and women who have served and who are currently serving in our armed forces. He successfully passed two amendments to the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which will improve mental health care for our wounded soldiers. The first amendment highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that 'medical care' as defined in this bill includes mental health care services. The second amendment requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program's research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service members. Both amendments passed with unanimous support. Additionally, as the Vice-Chairman of the Small Business Committee he supported the

Veterans' Programs Act of 2007 requires that two new Veteran Business Outreach Centers open in 2008 and 2009 to help veterans pursue or resume business activities after they leave service. It also requires a special outreach to veterans through the Department of Labor's Transition Assistance Program workshops.

"As someone who wore the cloth of this nation for 31 years, few things are more important to me than our obligation to support our veterans," said Sestak. "The needs of our veterans vary greatly, from who fought in World War II to those who are serving now in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have a moral obligation to keep our promises to those who have kept their promise to defend our nation."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.